

GENERAL LEE.

A CONFEDERATE HISTORY.

MEMOIRS OF ROBERT E. LEE. His Military and Political History. By R. E. Lee, formerly Military Secretary to General Lee, afterward Brigadier-General and Chief of Artillery, Second Corps, Army of Northern Virginia. Together with Incidents of His Life and Labors during the War. Collected and edited by MARCUS J. WRIGHT, formerly Brigadier-General, Army of Tennessee. Two vols. pp. 707. J. M. Stoddart & Co.

General Long has made no sensational disclosure which will require us to review accepted verdicts, but he has written an interesting military narrative, distinguished in general by a candid and manly spirit. It is by his persistent assurance of the superior courage, endurance, patriotism and devotion of the Southern soldier as compared with his Northern antagonist that he is most likely to provoke criticism. The victory, however, will not be over quick to take offence at the pride of the Confederate soldier in his gallant comrades who so long maintained the fight against heavy odds, and won nearly all their victories against superior forces; and they will not be grudge General Lee a particle of his fame as the hero of some of the most remarkable defensive campaigns in modern times. The alleged disparity of numbers between the Federal and Confederate troops in the principal engagements has been the subject of a great deal of controversy, and General Long's whose statements are probably extreme, does nothing to settle it. A difference in the Federal and Confederate methods of reckoning and masking out returns accounts for a part of the discrepancy. General Long quotes Lee as saying, in reply to an inquiry by General Meade after the surrender, that at no time during the final operations about Petersburg and Richmond did the force under his command exceed 35,000 men—which was about half Meade's estimate. But Lee's last official report during that campaign gives his aggregate strength as 73,349 present, 160,411 present and absent, on the 20th of February, 1865. The number surrendered at Appomattox is generally said by Confederate historians to have been only 10,000. The parole rolls, however, given by General Long, foot up 28,231. The fact is that about half Lee's army, including the whole of Ewell's corps, was captured a day or two before the surrender; so that General Long's statement that the fight of the Confederacy was maintained until the army, exclusive of stragglers and extra-duty men, was reduced to 10,000, must be taken with important qualifications. The 10,000 who laid down their arms were only the fractional remainder of an army which began to disperse as soon as Richmond was evacuated.

That McClellan greatly overrated Lee's strength during the Peninsula campaign, and indeed at all times, seems to be agreed by both sides. Lee understood this failing and counted upon it, as Johnston had previously done when he confronted McClellan at Manassas and Centreville. McClellan's constant calls for reinforcements were well known at Richmond, and Lee was encouraged by his adversary's obvious uneasiness to make that bold movement against the Federal right which forced McClellan to retreat from the Chickahominy to the James, separated the Army of the Potowmack from McClellan, and led to the abandonment of the Peninsula, the route of Pope, and the invasion of Maryland. Lee's superiority to his enemy in this campaign could hardly be questioned. A curious incident of the Seven Days' fight is related by General Long, which shows that Lee, like our own generals, could not always count upon the co-operation even of his best lieutenants when he had most reason to expect it. After Sumner's splendid stand enabled McClellan to gain his main body across the White Oak Swamp, Lee, with Longstreet and A. P. Hill, made a determined attack upon the flank of the retreating army, while Jackson was ordered to fall upon its rear. Lee fought till night, but Jackson did not support him and McClellan was enabled to push on to Malvern Hill. It turned out that Jackson was asleep, and his staff, out of mistaken sympathy, did not wake him!

The invasion of Maryland is admitted to have been a bad failure. Lee expected important political results from a rising of the people of the State as soon as he appeared among them, but nothing of the kind took place. Antietam is described as a drawn battle, which technically it undoubtedly was. Lee, however, expected a renewal of the attack, and was relieved when he found that General McClellan meant to wait for fresh troops. "Foreseeing that no important results could be achieved by a second battle with McClellan's augmented forces, and being unwilling to sacrifice unnecessarily his gallant men," he thereupon recrossed the Potowmack. The net result of the campaign was to destroy a great deal of the prestige which the Confederates had won on the Peninsula and at Bull Run, and to hearten the Northern people, who were much in want of encouragement. Lee is reported to have said that he considered McClellan the ablest, "by all odds," of the Union generals; but we do not know with what Union generals the comparison was made. General Long moreover observes that "this opinion could but have referred to his [McClellan's] skill as a tactician, as it is unquestionable that Lee availed himself of McClellan's over-caution and essayed perilous movements which he could not have safely ventured in the presence of a more active opponent." The most obvious criticism upon General Long's story of the battles of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville is that he makes too little account of the blunders of the Federal commanders. According to most of the authorities on our side, Lee ought to divide the credit of his success on those bloody fields with Burnside and Hooker. General Long reflects upon Franklin for the inactivity of his grand division at Fredericksburg, which he says was the cause of considerable surprise to the Confederates; but it is now well known that Franklin was kept idle by one of Burnside's unfortunate orders. Lee's general order concurring in his army on the Virginia declared that Burnside had been beaten and "hurled back" by less than 20,000 Confederates. General Long gives the "effective strength" of the Southern army as "about 60,000"; but the returns printed in his appendix show that even this is an underestimate. The "aggregate present" at Fredericksburg is officially given as 90,000, and the "present for duty" as 78,000. There was no great difference therefore between the two armies; but of course on neither side were all the troops engaged.

The choice of Gettysburg as a battlefield is sometimes spoken of as an accident; but from the outset Lee contemplated fighting just there. Two weeks before he began his march northward he explained his plan of campaign to General Long, invading Pennsylvania, he might be forced to give battle at either Chambersburg, Gettysburg, or York. He much preferred Gettysburg, because that was the most favorable point for keeping open his communications. He had no thought of reaching Philadelphia, as many supposed; but he believed that the Federal army, if defeated in a pitched battle, would have to retreat across the Susquehanna; that would give him control of Maryland, Western Pennsylvania and probably West Virginia; it would make a diversion in favor of the Western department, where the affairs of the Confederacy were growing desperate; and there was a strong likelihood that it would cause the fall of Washington. During the battle and the preliminary movements Lee had much cause to lament the lack of accord in the operations of his several commands, and in some cases the disregard of his express instructions. He was especially embarrassed on the march by the absence of Young Men—Country.

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